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E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [OAS](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: NOT SO CALM AFTER THE STORM - ELECTION
DIFFICULTIES APPEAR

Classified By: Ambassador Heather Hodges for reason 1.4 (D)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Contrary to initial reports that Ecuador's April 26 election went smoothly, cases of violence and fraud in a few provinces are coming to light in the days following the elections. Although these incidents are unlikely to alter the outcome in the Presidential race, general discontent with the National Electoral Council's inability to provide official election results within their projected timeframe continues to grow. Four days after the polls have closed, only 50% of the votes have been counted for National Assembly seats and international observation missions are going home with no clear verdict on this election process. End Summary.

ELECTION SUSPENDED DUE TO VIOLENCE

12. (SBU) The province of Manab, which is known for irregularities in past elections, was once again a hot spot for election-day trouble. In the city of Jipijapa, 15 political party observation delegates who suspected fraud by Correa's PAIS party began to tear and burn ballots in one polling station the evening of April 26. This triggered a series of similar acts in nearby precincts which resulted in reported destruction of 100 ballot boxes. Numerous cases of ballots destroyed by political party sympathizers were reported in other precincts in Manabi, as well as Guayas, Esmeraldas, Zamora Chinchipe, and Loja provinces. The National Electoral Council has resolved to have a re-vote on May 3 for five cities in four provinces with a total of 462 voting stations; other results are being appealed by the parties.

SUSPICIONS OF FRAUD MOSTLY UNFOUNDED

13. (C) In the city of Esmeraldas, candidates and their supporters have been in the streets since April 27, protesting what they charge was a fraudulent election. Multiple parties have been chanting "Electoral Fraud" outside of the Esmeraldas National Electoral Council branch and the PAIS mayoral candidate is demanding a recount of 133 ballot boxes. A police officer and a woman were reported injured. Street protests have also been reported in the provinces of Esmeraldas, Guayas, Santo Domingo, Los Rios, Loja and Santa Elena.

14. (C) The most vocal critic of the elections has been presidential runner-up and former president Lucio Gutierrez who, according to the latest results from the National Electoral Council, only received 28% of the votes compared to Correa's 52%. Days following the election, Gutierrez made a public pledge to galvanize the "Ecuadorian people in the resistance" against Correa and "not allow them to steal the election in the second round." His brother, Gilmar Gutierrez, in phone conversation with Embassy officials,

stated that they have attempted to present their complaints formally with the National Electoral Council, but they were not accepted. He emphasized what he viewed to be the Council taking their orders directly from the government. In spite of the claims by Gutierrez and other candidates, international observation teams have indicated that there were no obvious incidents of fraud, although acknowledging the confusion of the election could have allowed for it.

DISCONCERTING DELAY IN OFFICIAL RESULTS

¶5. (SBU) Four days after the polls closed, political candidates, civil society, citizens, and external observers are wondering: what is taking the National Electoral Council so long to announce results? According to the National Electoral Council, the intermediate counting centers were supposed to have completed their tasks the night of April 28, but official results are only partial so far. As of 8am on April 30, only three-quarter of President/Vice-President ballots had been counted (the first of the six ballots to be registered) and an average of 50% for national and provincial assembly races (although as little as 28% were counted in the province of Esmeraldas). This is in stark contrast with the National Electoral Council's projection to have 60% of all votes for President counted by the evening of the elections.

¶6. (SBU) Speculation on why the National Electoral Council was unable to accomplish their established deadlines include: the complexity of the ballots which delayed the ballot count at the polling station level; inexperienced poll workers; insufficient number of staff to execute the election,s

multifaceted logistics; and the exceptionally high number of invalid tally sheets reported (25-30%) compared to the traditional 1% of past elections. This latter figure, which was reported in El Comercio on April 30, is noteworthy since it signifies that at least a quarter of all votes nationwide will not be included in the official results until the "actas" are reviewed by the 24 provincial counting centers.

THE JURY IS STILL OUT

¶7. (SBU) In its initial report released on Monday, the OAS mission acknowledged the complexity of the April 26 elections and the limited time period the newly established National Electoral Council had to execute the elections. The report also highlighted the general "peaceful and respectful environment" of election day. However, Benamor made it clear in a presentation on Tuesday that it was too early to make a complete assessment of these elections. Based on qualitative and quick count surveys completed by 90 OAS observers in 23 provinces, the vote count process was the most disorganized aspect. Almost none of the polling station teams counted the ballots according to regulation, and many reported incidents of miscounting. The EU observation mission cited as a negative element the "dominant presence" of Rafael Correa prior to and during election day on the various media outlets, including those of the government.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) It is clear that the phase of appeals and claims against the National Electoral Council is just beginning. Amidst surmounting complaints, the newly established National Electoral Council appears to have fallen short of expectations. The various election troubles, and assertion of fraud, are not unusual for Ecuador. While an embarrassment for Correa's government, we do not expect the shortcomings of the election process to keep Correa off the course of his political agenda.

HODGES